EXAMINATION

OF

MR. PITT'S SPEECH,

IN THE

House of Commons,

ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1796,

Relative to the Condition of the Poor.

BY THE REV. J. HOWLETT,

Vicar of Great Dunmow, Essex.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR W. RICHARDSON, UNDER THE ROYAL-EXCHANGE.

M.DCC.XCVI.

44
3 29
202

EXAMINATION

OF

MR. PITT'S SPEECH.

NOTHING can be more intereſting to humanity, nor more immediately connected with the welfare and proſperity of a nation, than that the lower and labouring claſſes, from whom we ultimately receive every enjoyment, every convenience and elegance of life, ſhould be enabled, by the induſtrious exertions of that ſtrength and thoſe abilities which the Almighty has given them, to maintain themſelves and families in a certain degree of domeſtic eaſe and comfort: that they ſhould at leaſt have food to eat, clothes to put on, and fire to warm them. That this is far from being the caſe in this kingdom at preſent is generally acknowledged, and too clear to need any laboured proof.

It is equally evident, that, for the laſt forty or fifty years, ſome peculiarly favoured ſpots excepted, their condition has been growing worſe and worſe, and is, at length, become truly deplorable. Thoſe pale famiſhed countenances, thoſe tattered garments, and thoſe naked ſhivering limbs, we ſo frequently behold, are ſtriking teſtimonies of theſe melancholy truths. It gave me therefore ſingular pleaſure that our Houſe of Commons had taken the ſubject in its moſt ſerious conſideration, with a view, not only to alleviate the actual diſtreſſes of our poor, but to improve their ſituation for the future. And it afforded me not leſs ſatisfaction to be informed, that Mr. Pitt, perhaps one of the ableſt miniſters Great Britain ever poſſeſſed, had particularly intereſted himſelf in this important buſineſs, and had actually propoſed a plan for this purpoſe, which met with very general, if not univerſal, approbation. With uncommon eagerneſs I ſeized the firſt opportunity of reading in the public papers his ſpeech on this ſubject, addreſſed to the Commons, on Friday, the 12th of February. The peruſal, I confeſs, made a very different impreſſion upon my mind from what it was ſaid to have produced on the minds of his audience. I was indeed not a little chagrined and mortified to obſerve, that ſome of his leading ideas were directly oppoſite to thoſe I had long imagined were ſo clear and evident as to be a kind of firſt principles, altogether indubitable.

I felt, at the ſame time, ſo high a conception of his tranſcendent abilities, as, for a moment, to believe he muſt certainly be right, and that it would be utterly ridiculous in me to pretend to point out his apparent errors or miſapprehenſions. It however ſoon occurred, that the greateſt of men had been ſometimes miſtaken, and that what had eſcaped perſons of the brighteſt talents had often been diſcovered by thoſe of the moſt ordinary capacity. I obſerved, too, that Mr. Pitt himſelf informs us, that what he had ſtated was not ſo much the reſult of his own immediate inveſtigations as of what had been communicated to him by others. From theſe ſeveral reflections I was induced to ſuppoſe, that, of however low and inconſiderable eſtimation I might poſſibly be in the judgement of the world, I might ſtill eſcape all ſeverity of ſarcaſtic ridicule if I ventured to ſubmit my ideas to the conſideration of the public. I do not indeed indulge any confident expectation that what I have to advance will be generally approved, but at the ſame time I am willing to cheriſh the hopes that I may offer ſome ſuggeſtions, which by abler hands may be turned to the purpoſes of ſome utility.

Without farther apology, I proceed to examine the celebrated ſpeech in queſtion. It may not, however, be amiſs previouſly to obſerve, that the ſpeech muſt appear to great diſadvantage when deſ-

titute of thoſe rich and ſplendid embelliſhments of eloquence with which it was doubtleſs inveſted when it came from the ſpeaker. But we are chiefly concerned, not with the charms of its rhetoric, but with its leading arguments, and the general tenor of its reaſoning; and we may fairly preſume that theſe have been pretty correctly and accurately given.

Now, judging from the repreſentations here to be found, the ſpeech naturally divides itſelf into the following particulars.

Firſt, That the ſyſtem of our poor-laws, bad in its origin, worſe in its progreſs, has been the chief cauſe of the diſtreſſes and miſeries of our poor.

Secondly, That the legal regulation of their wages, though at preſent inadequate to their neceſſities, is in itſelf extremely abſurd, and would, inſtead of removing the wretchedneſs complained of, greatly increaſe and aggravate it.

Thirdly, What has lately been done in their favour, and the outlines of a plan, not merely for their farther relief, but to render their condition eaſy and comfortable.

Theſe are the leading propoſitions which ſeem to me to be held out in the ſpeech, and I will endea-

vour

vour to examine each of them, in the order now ſtated, in three diſtinct ſections.

SECTION I.

The general Syſtem of our Poor-Laws.

NOW what is this ſyſtem? What is its end and intention? Why, in the language of Judge Blackſtone, *to relieve the impotent poor, and to find employment for ſuch as are able to work.* — How can this increaſe the miſeries either of the one or the other? To relieve the diſtreſſes of the wretched, does it augment their wretchedneſs? To find employment and to compel the ſtrong and the able to work, is it a ſource of miſery? Does it not, on the contrary, hold out at once the pleaſures and the rewards of induſtry? And does this deſtroy the motives to economy and diligence, or encourage idleneſs and vice? To me it appears a moſt judicious union of wiſdom and humanity. This is the true ſpirit of our poor-laws. Whether they have been properly attended to and wiſely executed, is a queſtion diſtinct and foreign from our preſent inquiry.

Certainty of parochial aſſiſtance, whatever may happen, and whether a man be virtuous or vicious, induſtrious or lazy, it often has been ſaid, removes all concern and all anxiety about his future ſubſiſtence, makes him careleſs of his conduct, indifferent whether he work or play; agreeably to the famous old ſong, with which we are informed our poor-laws were inſulted ſoon after their firſt inſtitution:

" Hang ſorrow and caſt away care,
" The pariſh is bound to find us!"

However this may pleaſe the ſot in his cups, no man in his ſober ſenſes ever adopts ſuch reaſoning. The promiſe of the poor-laws, at moſt, can only remove the horror of periſhing by famine, and ſomewhat alleviate the ſorrows of ſickneſs and the pangs of diſeaſe. To do this is ſurely generous, humane, and benevolent. But how does it incite to idleneſs and vice? If I do not work, the pariſh will compel me. Is this more pleaſing than to do it of my own accord? Is it more agreeable to work under the ſcourge of the taſk-maſters than voluntarily to exert my utmoſt endeavours to provide for myſelf and family, and increaſe the joys and the pleaſures of my neareſt and deareſt connection? Shall I be vicious and profligate becauſe I know, that, after a long courſe of contempt and infamy, of rags and wretchedneſs, of infirmity, ſickneſs, and diſeaſe, the pariſh will provide me a doctor to protract

tract the wretched remains of life? Never did the profligate reaſon thus; never, generally ſpeaking, is he governed by ſuch diſtant views. Hurried on by the impulſe of paſſion and the cravings of appetite, he hears not the ſuggeſtions of reaſon, but is plunged in the gulph of perdition before he knows where he is or whither he is going; before the proviſions of the poor-laws or any thing of the kind enter his head.

Suppoſing a regard to the laws in queſtion at all to influence the conduct of the lower claſſes, their operation muſt be rather in favour of induſtry than againſt it. Theſe men indulge not refined ſpeculation, but are principally governed by what they every day ſee and hear. Grant that they know in general, that, let the worſt happen that may, the pariſh is obliged to maintain them; ſtill, allowing them the common ſenſe, the common apprehenſions and feelings, of human creatures, they will naturally aſk themſelves, *how* will it maintain us? Not in idleneſs, eaſe, and plenty; but, as it now maintains many of my neighbours, in rags, in cold, and hunger; and, if not contented with that, it will deprive us of liberty, and compel us to labour like arrant ſlaves or beaſts of burden as long as we can lift a hand or ſtir a foot. — Did ever any man leſs ſtupid than an aſs ever uſe ſuch arguments to encourage himſelf in idleneſs and vice? or think

them a ſatisfactory excuſe for omitting his utmoſt exertions to ſupport himſelf, independent of ſuch aſſiſtance? No man in health and ſtrength, poſſeſſing the ſpirit of an Engliſhman, but would ſpurn the idea, reſolving to work even his fleſh from his bones rather than ſink into the wretched ſituation. When indeed he finds, that, from the diſproportion of wages to the price of neceſſaries, his moſt ſtrenuous endeavours cannot ſecure him from want and miſery, cannot provide him a ſufficiency of meat, clothes, and fire, his heart dies within him, he reſigns himſelf to his fate, and every diſmal diſguſting conſequence too naturally follows.

It has always appeared to me a powerful argument, that our poor-laws are rather a reſtraint upon idleneſs than an incitement to it; that, when the diſtreſſed have nothing to truſt to but voluntary donation, they naturally have recourſe to every means of exciting compaſſion: the humane and benevolent are eaſily moved by the appearance of miſery; they eagerly liſten to the tale of woe, and are ſoon impoſed upon by counterfeited wretchedneſs. One ſucceſsful impoſtor produces many, and hypocritical beggars are multiplied: but, under our *poor-laws*, ſuch impoſitions and ſuch deceptions are difficult. The ſupport of the indigent comes now from perſons of every deſcription; not only from

from the good, the kind, and the tender, but alſo from the bad, the hard-hearted, and the cruel. Theſe latter will be zealous to reſtrain the laviſh hand of the former, and the pretenſions of every candidate for relief will be nicely examined; the keen eyes of avarice will ſee through the artful ſtories of the indolent and lazy; the cruel are unmoved at the ſight of diſtreſs, nor will they ſuffer a farthing to paſs from their pockets until abſolutely forced. Nay, even perſons of more enlarged and liberal minds, knowing that the laws have provided relief for every object, will be leſs inclined to the exerciſe of voluntary beneficence, and leſs liable to the impoſitions of artful lazineſs. Hence ariſes a more general dependence, in each individual, upon his own induſtrious endeavours; and hence, perhaps, in ſome meaſure it is, that England has fewer beggars, and more alert and vigorous exertions among the lower orders of our people, in the field, in the ſhop, at the loom, and in every ſpecies of employment, than in moſt other nations of Europe. In perfect harmony with this is the curious fact, that, even when deprived of liberty and the pure vivifying air, by being impriſoned in workhouſes, the Engliſh paupers earn twice, frequently three times, as much as thoſe of Scotland, though working at the ſame manufacture. This ſurely but ill accords with the reaſonings of Lord Kaims and Dr. Adam Smith, who both contend that our

ſyſtem

ſyſtem of poor-laws has rendered our labourers worthleſs and lazy, while thoſe of their own country are induſtrious and diligent.

It may be farther remarked, that if the ſpirit of our poor-laws has encouraged idleneſs and vice, and thereby occaſioned the heavy burden of parochial expenſes, and ſunk our poor in diſtreſs and wretchedneſs, this would have appeared moſt ſtrikingly very ſoon after their firſt eſtabliſhment. All laws moſt powerfully attract attention when they are new, and their execution is then the moſt carefully enforced. When their novelty ceaſes their operation abates, and they are more and more neglected. Whatever then the ſpirit of the laws before us, their full influence towards the effect complained of (independent of increaſed population, increaſed price of proviſions, and a few other particulars) muſt ſurely have taken place within the compaſs of the firſt forty or fifty years after their commencement. But as far as I know, or have been able from various inquiries to diſcover, there appears not the faineſt ſhadow of probability that the parochial expenſes were then at all conſiderable; nay, there is, methinks, a very ſtrong preſumption, that they were, within that period, trifling indeed. In pariſhes of this neighbourhood, only one hundred and fifty years ago, (that is a hundred years after their eſtabliſhment,) the rates were only two-pence in the pound:

pound: whereas now, notwithſtanding the rents are doubled, and the population very little if at all increaſed, they are advanced to 6*s.* and 8*s.*; that is more than in the proportion of 80 to 1. Theſe data are perhaps too few and confined to authorize any certain general concluſion; they, however, afford a very fair preſumption, that the fact in other quarters muſt have been nearly the ſame.

If we deſcend nearer to our times, we have extenſive evidence to the ſame purpoſe. Towards the cloſe of the laſt century, our rates were riſen to about half a million; from that time to about the year 1750, they probably advanced half a million farther; ſince that æra they have increaſed to conſiderably above two millions, perhaps two millions and a half; that is, in the laſt forty years they have advanced almoſt four times as faſt as in the fifty years immediately preceding. Effects ſo widely different can never have proceeded from the ſame individual cauſe.

It does not then appear, either from fact or ſpeculation, that the general ſyſtem of our poor-laws has *encouraged idleneſs, fettered the exertions of induſtry, cauſed the prodigious advance of our expenſes, or the miſeries and wretchedneſs of the poor.*

But,

But, although the general ſpirit of theſe laws may not have occaſioned the dreadful evils ſo juſtly lamented, particular parts of it may. We are accordingly told, "the laws of the parochial ſettlement of our poor have been *peculiarly* prejudicial to induſtry, by obſtructing the circulation of labour; that they have increaſed the burden of the country, by oppreſſing individuals, by preventing the capitaliſt from employing the labourer, and deterred the labourer from going to another market." This matter, therefore, let us next conſider.

Effects of the Laws of Settlement.

It muſt be confeſſed, that this part of our poor-laws does, at firſt ſight, appear to poſſeſs the pernicious tendency juſt now repreſented; and there can be no doubt, that, in ſome particular caſes, it has been greatly injurious to individual perſons. And what law was ever framed againſt which the ſame accuſation might not very juſtly be brought? Of which, however, the general beneficial influence cannot be denied; and the queſtion ſhould always be, not how they affect a few private individuals, but what is their general operation upon the community at large. In this extenſive view, it may, perhaps, be doubted, whether theſe laws have not

ſaved

ſaved as many from ruin by reſtraining their rambling diſpoſition and keeping them at home, as they have injured by preventing the more advantageous exerciſe of their trade or occupation in places diſtant from where, by theſe laws, they had gained a ſettlement; agreeably to the old adage, the *rolling-ſtone gathers no moſs*. Nine times in ten the man, whether mechanic or a labourer in huſbandry, who ſtays at home, and diligently works at his calling where he is legally fixed, does vaſtly better than he who rambles about from place to place, and from pariſh to pariſh, in ſearch of higher wages or more profitable employment.

But we need not inſiſt upon this. The operation of the laws of ſettlement, conſidered in a general view, has been trifling indeed. How ſeldom do the young and healthy, while ſingle, find any difficulty in changing their reſidence, and fixing where they pleaſe? Does the tradeſman or manufacturer, while his trade or his manufacture flouriſhes, refuſe to take an apprentice, or employ a journeyman, becauſe he was born or ſettled in a different pariſh or in a diſtant part of the kingdom? On the contrary, does he not eagerly look out for him, and gladly receive him from whatever quarter he may come? Were it otherwiſe, how has it happened that Sheffield, Birmingham, Mancheſter, have increaſed from almoſt mere villages to opulent towns, that rival, or even

even ſurpaſs, in magnitude, our largeſt cities, *the capital* alone excepted. And, as to ſervants in huſbandry, they range from pariſh to pariſh and from county to county, unthinking of and unreſtrained by the laws of ſettlement; the farmer without ſcruple hires them; at length they marry, and there they fix. Rambling is then at an end, or ruin follows. If a huſbandry-labourer has four or five children, it rarely happens that above three of them ſettle where they were born; while of thoſe actually reſident, even in our ſmaller towns and country pariſhes, nearly one-fifth have their legal ſettlement elſewhere. In this pariſh of Dunmow, out of about two hundred and twenty families, mechanics and labourers in huſbandry included, about forty belong to other places. Were the hands and legs of the poor ſo tied and chained as ſome ſeem to imagine, we ſhould ſee that where they were born, there they lived and there they died:

> " Fix'd, like a plant, to their peculiar ſpot,
> " To draw nutrition, propagate, and rot."

But a man need but open his eyes to diſſipate the ſtrange imagination; he will immediately behold that all are in motion; that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, are for ever ſhifting habitations, from the eaſt to the weſt, from the north to the ſouth; from Kent to Cornwall, from the Land's End to Berwick-upon-Tweed. No nation under

under Heaven, in which this exchange of reſidence is ſo ſtrikingly manifeſt, as in England; and, what is more directly to our purpoſe, it is now five times as great as before the laws of ſettlement took place. To hear, therefore, gentlemen talk of their dreadful conſequences; how they *have ſhackled the exertions of induſtry, obſtructed the circulation of labour, and gradually brought on that miſery and wretchedneſs with which our poor are at length overwhelmed*, one would ſuppoſe they had been all their life-time either immured within the walls of a college, or never emerged from the ſmoke and fogs of London, nor caſt a ſingle glance on theſe ſtriking facts exhibited in every quarter of the kingdom.

Dr. Adam Smith, many years ago, in his Wealth of Nations, urged the ſame idea I am here oppoſing. He aſſerted that "*our ſucceſſive laws of ſettlement had "almoſt entirely deſtroyed the free circulation of labour, "had occaſioned the great difference in its price which "we frequently find in England in places at no great "diſtance from one another; and had often rendered "it nearly impoſſible, that the ſcarcity of hands in one "place ſhould be relieved by the ſuperabundance in "another, as it is conſtantly in Scotland.*"—Had the Doctor lived to have read *Sir John Sinclair's Statiſtical Account* of that country, (which, by the way, affords as much uſeful information of the kind as was ever before collected, and it is difficult to ſay whether

whether it does greater honour to the perſon who ſo judiciouſly applied for it, or the clergy who ſo readily and ſo ſkilfully furniſhed it,) he would, perhaps, have been inclined to ſome ſlight alteration of ſentiment. He would have diſcovered that the price of labour is as various in the northern part of Great Britain as in the ſouthern, and the ſlighteſt view of our towns of Leeds, Liverpool, and innumerable others, might have convinced him that *the circulation of labour is as free, and the ſcarcity of hands in one place as amply ſupplied by their ſuper-abundance in another*, on the ſouth ſide of the Tweed as on the north.

Upon the whole, we may fairly preſume, that however unfavourable may be the appearance of our laws of ſettlement, however pernicious may be thought their tendency, or however injurious they may have occaſionally been to ſome individuals, they are ſo far from having been a principal cauſe of that wretched ſtate of deſtitution into which our poor are ſunk, that, in fact and reality, I am ſtrangely deceived, or they have been no cauſe at all; and, of courſe, we muſt not entertain any very ſanguine expectation, either from their entire repeal, or their more judicious regulation.*

Mr.

* It is curious to obſerve to what a variety of cauſes the heavy and growing burden of our rates have been imputed. Some

Mr. Pitt aſſerted, it ſeems, that, were the laws of ſettlement taken entirely away, or more judiciouſly regulated,

Labour would gradually find its own level.

What

Some aſcribe it to the general ſyſtem and ſpirit of our poor-laws; ſome, on the contrary, to their defective execution; ſome to the engroſſing and enlargement of farms; ſome to the number of public houſes; ſome to the vice, profligacy, and lazineſs of the poor; ſome to gentlemen's increaſing dereliction of country reſidence; ſome to the encloſure of commons and waſte-lands; and an author, whoſe work I read a few years ago, is confident it has, in a great meaſure, been occaſioned by the prodigious increaſe and growth of *methodiſm*. The paſſage in which this idea is advanced, as it is ſomewhat extraordinary, and not unplauſibly reaſoned, I ſhall here tranſcribe. — " Of " late years," ſays this writer, " there has been a very gene- " ral complaint, over every part of the kingdom, of the increaſe " of the pariſh poor. To what cauſe are we to aſcribe this " increaſe? No cauſe whatever has a more powerful influence " than the increaſe of methodiſts. This religion, in the firſt " place, is a heavy tax; and, in the ſecond, it encourages idle- " neſs; and both of theſe contribute to make men poor, and " to keep them in that ſtate. I would propoſe it then as a " ſubject of inquiry, have the poor's rates increaſed with the " increaſe of *methodiſm?* Perhaps, upon examination, they will " be found to have kept pace with the progreſs of this religion: " and it would give this opinion ſome weight, if the rates in " particular places have correſponded with the prevalence of " methodiſm. A ſecond queſtion might be propoſed: have

What we are to underſtand by labour finding its own level, I am not abſolutely certain. It muſt, however, I think, mean one of theſe two things: either that the price of labour would ſoon be reduced to an equality throughout the kingdom, or it would riſe in due proportion to the advanced price of proviſions, and of courſe furniſh the labourer an adequate ſupport. If the former be intended, there is already, as I think I have ſhewn

" the poor in Scotland, where this profeſſion has fewer votaries,
" increaſed with that rapidity they have done in the ſouthern
" part of the iſland ?"

Review of the Policy, Doctrines, and Morals, of the Methodiſts, p. 50.

The reader may perhaps ſmile at this opinion; but I do frankly declare, that, in my preſent conception, and as far as I have yet ſeen, it is as plauſible, and is here as logically ſupported, as any of thoſe ſtated above.

We have lately had no leſs diverſity of ſentiment reſpecting the cauſe of the preſent exorbitant price of wheat. Some tell us it is owing to monopoly; ſome to the engroſſing and enlargement of farms; and ſome to the war: not one of which, in my apprehenſion, has been more concerned in it than the man in the moon. The general leading cauſe, in each caſe, is ſimple, clear, and obvious. The high price of wheat (above the price of other articles of proviſion) has naturally ariſen from a deficiency of crops: the heavy and growing burden of our rates from a deficiency of wages.

above,

above, no greater variety than takes place in other countries where the reſtrictive laws in queſtion are unknown; if the latter, as I am inclined to ſuppoſe from the general tenor of the reaſoning adopted, it will be no difficult matter to prove that it is totally unfounded.

It is, I think, an indubitable maxim, and of univerſal application, that every thing, of immediate indiſpenſable neceſſity, will be dear or cheap as it is ſcarce or plentiful. With regard to the ſubject before us, if hands be numerous, and the demand for labour comparatively ſmall, labour will be cheap; if hands be few, and the demand for labour comparatively great, it will as certainly be dear. The former, as it appears to me, is actually the caſe in this kingdom at preſent. From the rapid increaſe of population on the one hand, and from the introduction of machines and variety of inventions to abridge and facilitate labour on the other, we have more hands than we are diſpoſed or think it advantageous to employ; and hence the price of work is become unequal to the wants of the workman. And this ſeems to have been preciſely the caſe in France before the revolution. In the neighbourhood of Orleans, prior to that diſtinguiſhed event, I am aſſured, by perſons on the ſpot, the number of people was ſo exceſſively great, and the price of labour ſo extremely low and diſproportionate to the

price of proviſions and the neceſſities of the poor, that all around, among the labouring orders, was one general ſcene of deſtitution, wretchedneſs, and miſery; the rich and wealthy, meantime, were rioting in the moſt luxurious extravagance. Now, as I learn from the ſame quarter, matters are totally reverſed. The ſucceſsful uſurpers, by taking off the overflowing abundance of their peaſants and mechanics, and ſending them to their armies to be ſlaughtered on the field of battle, have produced a ſcarcity of hands to perform the neceſſary labour; the wages of which are of courſe become exorbitantly high, not only in their nominal and money-price value, but in proportion to the advanced price of neceſſaries. The mechanic and the peaſant are in a ſtate eaſy and comfortable, while their former ſuperiors find it difficult to live; thoſe only excepted who have ſhared in the general plunder. Should it pleaſe the Almighty to command the ſword, peſtilence, or famine, to go through our land, and reduce our labouring poor to half their preſent amount, their wages inſtantly would riſe, not only to a height equal to their wants, but vaſtly higher, thereby proving the inſignificance of the abolition of the laws of ſettlement; and I have little doubt but the great, the wealthy, and the opulent, among us, would ſoon ſee the neceſſity, in imitation of their predeceſſors, to check the exorbitance by legal reſtraint. When will the world learn equity and juſtice, *and*

do

do unto others what they would that others ſhould do unto them? If it be right and juſt that the rich ſhould not be impoſed upon by the knavery of the poor, is it right and juſt that the poor ſhould be cruſhed to death by the cruelty of the rich? If legal regulation of wages be expedient in favour of the wealthy, why not expedient in behalf of the needy? No inconvenience ever reſulted from the former, why ſhould we dread it from the latter? But the diſcuſſion of this point muſt be the buſineſs of the next ſection.

SECTION II.

Legal Regulation of Wages in Huſbandry.

MR. Whitbread, on the ſecond reading of his bill for amending and explaining the 5th of Elizabeth, which empowers magiſtrates to fix and regulate the price of wages in huſbandry, obſerves, that the principle of the bill he now introduced was authorized by the 8th of his preſent majeſty, by which the wages of tailors and ſilk-weavers were made ſubject to the regulations of magiſtrates. In this, he appears to me to be perfectly right. The entire unity and ſameneſs in the principle and grand

object of the two bills are, I think, indubitable; *i. e.* the benefit and advantage of certain deſcriptions of men. No, ſays Mr. Pitt, their objects are totally different. The object of the tailors' and weavers' bill was to prevent their combinations; the object of the bill, now introduced, is to alleviate the hardſhips and diſtreſſes of the peaſantry. Both theſe aſſertions are true, and yet the concluſion deduced from them is falſe; and the fallacy ſeems to have been, that the two bills, each reſpectively, are viewed in different lights; the one regarding only the perſons meant to be *reſtrained*, the other reſpecting merely the perſons intended to be relieved and benefited. My intended argument will receive illuſtration from a paſſage in the Wealth of Nations, by Dr. Adam Smith. "Whenever," ſays he, vol. i. page 121, "the legiſlature attempts to regulate the "differences between maſters and their workmen, "its counſellors are always the maſters. Whenever the regulation is in favour of the workmen, "it is always juſt and equitable; but it is ſometimes "otherwiſe when in favour of the maſters. Thus "the law, which obliges the maſters, in ſeveral "different trades, to pay their workmen in money "and not in goods, is quite juſt and equitable. It "impoſes no real hardſhip upon the maſters; it "only obliges them to pay that value in money, "which they pretended to pay, but did not always "really pay, in goods. This law is in favour of

"the

" the workmen, but the 8th of George III. is in " favour of the maſters. When maſters combine " together in order to reduce the wages of the " workmen, they commonly enter into a private " bond or agreement not to give more than a cer- " tain wage under a certain penalty. Were the " workmen to enter into a contrary combination of " the ſame kind, not to accept of a certain wage " under a certain penalty, the law would puniſh " them very ſeverely; and, if it dealt impartially, " it would treat the maſters in the ſame manner. " But the 8th of George III. enforces by law that " very regulation which maſters ſometimes attempt " to eſtabliſh by ſuch combinations." — Apply this to the ſubject before us. The object of the weavers' and tailors' bill was to prevent the combination of the *workmen*; the object of Mr. Whitbread's bill is to diſſolve the combination of the *maſters*. Not a combination indeed formally drawn up in writing and ſanctioned under hand and ſeal; a combination, however, as certain (the reſult of contingencies or providential events) and as fatally efficacious as if in writing it had filled five hundred ſkins of parchment; a combination which has operated for many years with a force rapidly increaſing; a combination which has *kept back the hire of our labourers who have reapt down our fields*, and has, at length, torn the clothes from their backs, ſnatched the food from their mouths, and ground the fleſh

from their bones. Their cries have pierced the Heavens, and aſcended to the throne of God! A combination ſo pernicious ſhould ſurely be diſſolved; if not freely, by legal interference. By legal interference, the combination of weavers and tailors was broken, and their wages limited to their wants. Was not this the end in view, and was not this end accompliſhed? Were not the maſters benefited? And through them did not the benefit redound to the public? It is not denied. — Did evil follow? Did it plunge the workmen in wretchedneſs and ruin? It is not pretended. — What was beneficial in one caſe, why ſhould it not in another ſo perfectly alike? Legal regulation anſwered its end in favour of one ſet of men, why ſhould it not in behalf of another? And is not the urgency, reſpecting the latter, ten times as great as it was in the former?

Dr. Burn obſerves, in his Hiſtory of the Poor-Laws, "that it is time to lay aſide all thoughts of "legal regulation of wages, which the experience "of more than 400 years has ſhewn to be ineffec-"tual." This was mere aſſertion, unſupported by reaſon or the ſlighteſt probability. A thouſand circumſtances might be urged againſt this ſtrange idea; but what has been ſtated above ſhews, by the powerful evidence of fact, that he was totally deceived.

But

But the Doctor ſtops not here; but goes on and aſſerts that legal regulation is not only nugatory, but exceedingly pernicious, deſtroying at once *induſtry*, *ingenuity*, and *emulation*. In this Mr. Pitt coincides; nay even adds, very conſiſtently indeed, that it would, inſtead of relieving the diſtreſſes of the labourer, greatly increaſe them, and ſink him ſtill deeper in miſery. Heavy charges! but how are they ſupported?

It is urged, in the firſt place, that it cannot diſtinguiſh between the *married* man and the *ſingle*. And where is the neceſſity it ſhould? Time was when the wages of the labourer were equal to his wants. The married man, with a wife and five or ſix children, could himſelf earn no more than the bachelor who had none. And where was the evil? No where. If what thus aroſe from the natural unreſtricted current of events produced no inconvenience, why ſhould it when the reſult of legal regulation? The bachelor, it is true, might wear a better coat and have a little more money in his pocket; and, if he had any great ſuperfluity of caſh, government might poſſibly contrive to eaſe him of it by a tax. — This objection then is really nothing.

It is farther contended, "*that the meaſure could* "*be adapted only to the average-number of perſons in* "*a poor family*; *that* THAT, *in the judgement of one* "*of the beſt of our writers, is four,* — *the man, his* "*wife, and two children*; *and that what would be* "*adequate to the maintenance of theſe would be in-* "*ſufficient to ſupply the neceſſities of large families,* "*who principally need aſſiſtance, and of courſe would* "*greatly increaſe the hardſhips complained of.*"

Let us examine the ideas here ſuggeſted. On the authority, it ſeems, of one of the beſt of our writers, the average-number in a poor family is only four,* — the man, his wife, and two children. Who this writer is I am not ſolicitous to inquire; becauſe, if his average was formed on the only juſt foundation, it is certainly erroneous. In deducing the medium for the purpoſe now before us, we are ſurely not to comprehend perſons of every age, from twenty years to fourſcore or a hundred. This would include a long liſt of blind and lame, infirm and decrepid, utterly incapable of work, and with whom our preſent inquiry is therefore unconcerned. A medium grounded on this datum is, it is true, nearly as above given. But ſuch a medium would, in fact, charge young and middle-

* This was the average ſtated in all the papers I have ſeen.

aged

aged labourers with the ſupport and maintenance of the old; an idea too ridiculous to merit a moment's attention. The only proper medium, if any be ſo, muſt be taken from men ſtill ſo far in the ſtrength and vigour of life, as to be able, generally ſpeaking, to perform a reaſonable and full day's work. Theſe are limited to the ſhort period of about thirty years; that is, from about twenty years old to little more than fifty. This principle, which, as appears by repeated ſurveys of the very extenſive pariſh of Dunmow, gives us an average of about five to a family. Aſſuming this as the ſtandard of regulation, only give the labourer what would furniſh as much per head as the paupers are found to coſt in our large parochial workhouſes, or in our celebrated houſes of induſtry, where there is every advantage for cheapneſs, and allow him the common feelings, the common paſſions and principles, of human nature, you render his condition comparatively eaſy and comfortable indeed! Had this been done only ſixty years ago, and properly continued ever ſince, varying as ſucceſſive exigencies required, our poor-rates, inſtead of being almoſt trippled, would have been increaſed merely in due proportion to the increaſe of our people and the *poſitive* advance in the price of proviſions. Though even in that caſe the aggregate augmentation muſt have been £500,000, the comfort of the poor, however, would have been

been greatly promoted, and their morality, ſuppoſing them not to be brutes but men, would very probably have been very different from what it is at preſent; nor would there have been any need of workhouſes or houſes of induſtry at all, either parochial or for whole counties and diſtricts.

Such, I firmly believe, would have been the general reſult from the ſtandard fixed as above. But where is the neceſſity of ſtating it ſo low? When wages tolerably balanced the coſt of neceſſaries, a man could maintain himſelf and wife, with not only three, but four, five, or even ſix, children; and how many ſoever there may be above that number would generally be able to maintain themſelves; unleſs, indeed, we ſuppoſe a woman ſo exceedingly prolific as to have three or four children at a birth five or ſix times in ſucceſſion; and for ſuch ſuperabundance ſurely no one could grudge a handſome allowance per head, not as a gratuity, but as a matter of right and legal claim.

But a fixed ſtandard, it ſeems, *would diſcourage induſtry, ingenuity, and emulation.* This, I confeſs, is far beyond my comprehenſion. How could it diſcourage induſtry, to aſſure a man, if he exerted himſelf properly, he would be able to maintain himſelf and family in decency and comfort? Allowing him the common affections of nature, the common

common attachments to a wife and children, ſo far from diſcouraging induſtry, it would be a conſtant ſpur to the moſt vigorous exertions.

And, as for *ingenuity and emulation*, how would they be affected? The reaſon and explanation of this do not ſeem to have been particularly given; but, from a certain ſimilarity of language, I ſuppoſe them nearly the ſame with thoſe of Dr. Burn, in the paſſage already referred to. "Were all perſons," ſays the Doctor, "in the ſame kind of "work, to require equal wages, there would be no "room for ingenuity and emulation."

With regard to *ingenuity*, if the *fool* does as much of the ſame kind of work as the *wiſe man*, why ſhould he not be paid as much? But different kinds of work may require different degrees of ingenuity, and may therefore claim different degrees of pay, whether this pay be fixed by law, or is the reſult of voluntary contract. Nay, in the very ſame kind of work, he that does it beſt will always be moſt eagerly employed. Beſides, inventions, (the privilege of ingenuity,) whether of machines for abridging, facilitating, or expediting, labour, or for the more ſubſtantial and efficacious performance of it, will always meet their reward. In each and every caſe, therefore, the encouragement of *ingenuity*

nuity and the incitements to *emulation* remain undiminiſhed.

The whole of the objection before us, indeed, receives full refutation from what has followed the act for reſtricting the wages of the London tailors. Were there any ſolid ground for the objection, we ſhould ſoon have beheld a ſtrange alteration in theſe gentlemen. Inſtead of thoſe alert nimble perſonages they now are, they would ſoon have become moping lazy drones and ſilly ſtupid dolts. The change of appearance, likewiſe, in the reſt of the citizens would have been equally ſtriking. Scarcely would they have had clothes to wear; or, at beſt, thoſe only of the moſt awkward and clumſy fabrication. How different is the fact? They can ſtill have as many garments, of as great variety, and with every wiſhed-for expedition, as they can pay for. The beaux too can decorate their ſweet perſons with every fancied elegance of dreſs; and, aided by the *ingenious heads* and *emulous fingers* of the artiſts in queſtion, are fully enabled, ſummer and winter, ſpring and autumn, to keep pace with the moſt rapid and capricious variations of faſhion. Neither *induſtry*, *ingenuity*, nor *emulation*, then, have departed from theſe moſt uſeful manufacturers, notwithſtanding the reſtrictive law which regulates their wages. And what is true of the mechanic and the

the artiſt is equally true of the labourer in huſbandry.

The ſtatute of Elizabeth, and the ſucceſſive laws for regulating the price of wages, fixed the price of agricultural *piece-work*. This is unneceſſary. It is indeed exceedingly abſurd, and it might, with ſome plauſibility at leaſt, be queſtioned, whether, if rigorouſly enforced, it might not rather tend to diſhearten induſtry, to diſcourage ingenuity, and check emulation. But, in truth, ſuch regulations would be ridiculous, and, conſiſtently with common ſenſe, altogether impracticable. The laws referred to directed how much was to be paid for reaping an acre of wheat, for cutting an acre of graſs, for mowing an acre of barley; how much for thraſhing a quarter of peas, wheat, beans, barley, oats. This was ridiculous. Theſe articles are all and each of them ſo infinitely various, even in the ſame year, in the ſame pariſh, in the ſame field, that no common ſtandard can ſuit any one of them. But only fix the price of daily labour for the bulk and general run of workmen, and all the reſt will follow of courſe, as matter of voluntary contract. This voluntary contract may, nay certainly *will*, be the ſame, whether the daily wages be regulated by the cuſtom and practice of a neighbourhood, or be the reſult of immediate legal preſcription. Should the price, eſtabliſhed by either, be, for example, a

ſhilling

ſhilling a day, the labourer, who agrees by the *piece*, as he will work a greater number of hours, and much more vigorouſly exert himſelf, will take care, as he has certainly an equitable right, ſo to make his bargain as to earn ſixteen or eighteen pence. If the ſtandard be already advanced ſo high as theſe latter ſums, he will, by his *piece-work* agreement, obtain twenty-pence or two ſhillings. This is nearly the proportion between *day*-work and *piece*-work at preſent; and no poſſible reaſon can be given why a ſimilar proportion ſhould not take place under legal regulation. I repeat it, therefore; fix the daily wages, and all the reſt follows of courſe; all is done that can be wiſhed. Perfect liberty remains, and full room is left for voluntary contracts, juſt the ſame as now. Here is an encouragement to induſtry; here is a reward for ſuperior ingenuity and ſtrength; here is a keen ſpur to uſeful emulation!

Upon the whole, as I have not been able to diſcover the ſmalleſt weight in the objections to the legal regulation of the wages in huſbandry noticed above, or in any other I have ever met with, I moſt heartily wiſh, for the comfort and morality of the poor, for the benefit and advantage of the public, that ſome judicious meaſures may ſoon be adopted for that purpoſe. — To expect that the employers of the poor ſhould generouſly come forward,

ward, and, of their own accord, vary and increaſe the wages of their workmen, in proportion to their varying and increaſing neceſſities, is utterly hopeleſs: they muſt be more than man; they muſt have more humanity, more benevolence, more juſtice, more real *patriotiſm*, than uſually fall to the ſhare of any rank or order in ſociety. They will no more do it, than they would make good roads without the aid of turnpikes or the preſcription of ſtatutes enforced by the magiſtrate. Nothing, but either the compulſion of law or of future providential events can ever be effectual. May thoſe events not be ſimilar to thoſe dreadful ones intimated in the preceding ſection, *famine*, *ſword*, *peſtilence*, or *revolution*, but ſuch only as may ariſe from the increaſing wealth and the increaſing proſperity of the kingdom!

SECTION III.

The leading Parts of Mr. Pitt's Plan for alleviating the Diſtreſſes and improving the Condition of the Poor.

WE are now come to the plan propoſed by Mr. Pitt to alleviate the diſtreſſes and improve the condition of the poor. I muſt, however, firſt remark that he ſeems to think that much has already been done for this deſirable purpoſe by an act of the legiſlature, ſubſervient to the wiſe and benevolent deſigns of our friendly and amicable ſocieties. This act ſecures every member of theſe ſocieties from being removed out of the pariſh where he can probably beſt get his bread. This exemption may perhaps be advantageous to a few individuals in manufacturing-towns; but it is not likely, comparatively ſpeaking, to have any very extenſive influence. The number of thoſe removed after becoming *actually* chargeable, and thoſe who are removed when *likely* to become chargeable, will be ſmall indeed!

But, whatever the advantage of this privilege, I am apprehenſive it is granted to perſons who have no

no peculiar claim to it. There does not appear, as far as I have yet been able to diſcover, that amicable ſocieties have been of any *general* benefit, whatever relief they may have afforded in particular inſtances. It is rather a ſuſpicious circumſtance againſt them, that, ſince their increaſed prevalence, the advance of our rates has been more rapid than ever, eſpecially where they have been moſt numerous and of longeſt continuance. This is, at leaſt, a ſtrong preſumption that they have at beſt been of no very eſſential importance or extenſive utility; and I preſume they never will, while permitted to be holden at public-houſes: and, if this permiſſion were denied them, I am ſtrangely deceived if a great part of them would not ſoon be diſſolved. But, whatever advantages they may have produced, the bill lately paſſed in their favour will not, I am inclined to think, much increaſe their number. Should I be fortunate enough to procure a ſufficient extent and variety of data from which to form a decided judgement, I mean to give the ſubject a minute and full diſcuſſion. For the preſent I will only ſay that there is in their favour *vague ſuperficial ſpeculation*, corroborated by a few facts applicable to a few individuals; that, on the contrary, the ſpeculation againſt them has a much deeper and more extenſive foundation, ſtrengthened by the appearance of facts extremely general.

The lending ſmall Capitals.

I hope we are not to conſider the utility of what has already been done as a pledge of what we are to expect in future. Another mode propoſed for aſſiſting the induſtrious poor is, the advancing ſmall capitals, which may be repaid in two or three years; when the perſon who repays it will probably have made an addition to his income. — A generous propoſal! But, whatever plauſibility of an appearance it may preſent to a ſlight ſuperficial view, it will moſt probably in the end do more harm than good. Wherever a poor labourer or little tradeſman is known to be uncommonly careful and induſtrious, and there is the ſmalleſt probability that a few pounds would enable them to better their condition, by taking a ſmall farm that might advantageouſly offer, or by increaſing their preſent inconſiderable trade, it ſeldom happens but that their maſters, or ſome other kind friend or neighbour, will readily lend it them. Many inſtances of this kind do I remember: ſome of them have very well anſwered their laudable intention, others have proved of no ſervice, and the *ſmall capitals* thus advanced have never been repaid.

But, allowing the friendly generous deſign to have been accompliſhed in every inſtance, the propoſed

propoſed ſcheme would ſoon prevent the continuance of them among private individuals. They would naturally reaſon, there is now no occaſion for my aſſiſtance; government has taken the buſineſs upon itſelf, which is much more capable of completing its benevolent intentions than I am, and it would there be downright folly in me to do any thing at all. — And here would ariſe a curious dilemma. If no *ſecurity* were required for money advanced from perſons capable of full reſponſibility, recommendations of improper objects would be ſo numerous, that, were all applications ſucceſsful, there would be a moſt laviſh profuſion of the public money, a large proportion of which would be ſquandered away and never returned. On the other hand, if ſecurity be made *indiſpenſable*, no one will give it who would not have advanced the requiſite ſum himſelf. This part of the plan therefore furniſhes weapons for its own deſtruction. It is, as it appears to me, *the mere fabric of a viſion*, which a few years trial will diſſipate in empty air, *and leave not a wreck behind.*

Proper Perſons to report the State of Pariſhes.

Mr. Pitt obſerves, " That perſons, properly " qualified, ſhould be appointed to report the ſtate " of pariſhes to the magiſtrates at the petty ſeſſions;

" that the magiſtrates ſhould ſtate it at their quar-
" ter-ſeſſions; and that reports ſhould regularly
" come before parliament every year. That thus
" would it be known, through every pariſh, through
" every county, in the kingdom, that the exertions
" of any perſon ſhould not be unnoticed, and that
" the zeal of the meritorious would be rewarded."
— This muſt ſurely meet with univerſal approba-
tion. It is, indeed, truly excellent, and has long
been wanted. But the moſt diſtinguiſhed part of
its excellence is, that, although it will probably e-
vince the utter futility of every other part of the
plan propoſed, it may poſſibly lead to ſomething
ſubſtantially and extenſively uſeful. It therefore ur-
gently claims to be put in immediate execution.
" *For, we ſhall by this means be informed what is the*
" *number employed in labour, what their earnings,*
" *what the ſucceſs of the ſchools of induſtry which*
" *may be inſtituted.*"

Schools of Induſtry.

As to the ſucceſs of theſe *ſchools*, though much
ſeems to be promiſed, I have no ſanguine expecta-
tion that they will turn out more beneficial than
houſes of induſtry; and what they have accompliſhed
is pretty clear.

Mr.

Mr. Henry Fielding, more than forty years ago, formed a plan for county-workhouſes, which were to operate wonders. By the aſſumption of a few data, unſupported by fact, or even any rational ſpeculation, he confidentially aſſured the public, that, if his ſcheme were adopted for the county of Middleſex, the paupers contained in it would earn £2000 more than their maintenance; that the total annual expenſe of the poor in the county, at that time amounting to £70,000, would ſoon be reduced to under £12,000. All this was enforced with that ſtrong energetic language he ſo eminently poſſeſſed, and the whole kingdom was ſo filled with enthuſiaſtic admiration of theſe miraculous manſions, that a moſt flaming zeal ſuddenly aroſe to erect ſomething of the ſame kind in every quarter. Upon cooler conſideration, however, counties were thought rather too extenſive completely and eaſily to accompliſh the end propoſed. Large *parochial workhouſes and diſtrict-houſes of induſtry*, it was imagined, might be more conveniently managed and prove more beneficial. Numbers of both have accordingly been eſtabliſhed in different parts, ſtill retaining the ſame general principles; and the wonders that have followed are, that the county of Middleſex, inſtead of reducing its expenſes from £70,000 to under £12,000, has advanced them to nearly, if not quite, £200,000. And the utmoſt the diſ-

trict-houſes of induſtry have affected, in the view now immediately before us, is, they have continued to maintain their paupers at double the ſum per head they could have maintained themſelves for in their own cottages.

Mr. Fielding's magnificent promiſes failed, becauſe they were founded on data totally falſe; and Mr. Pitt's reaſonings, many of them at leaſt, we have ſeen are deduced from principles equally fallacious; and we cannot therefore indulge any confident expectation of great and extenſive benefit to be produced by his plan, eſpecially from his ſchools of induſtry.

The overſeers' returns to parliament of the ſums expended in ſetting the poor to work were fallacious and deluſive.

I ſuſpect that Mr. Pitt, like many other gentlemen, has been ſomewhat miſled *by the report of the committee appointed to conſider the returns of the pariſh-officers in the year* 1786, *relative to the ſtate of the poor*; and that he has thence been induced to ſuppoſe, that the induſtry of the lower claſſes, and the attention of the overſeers to employ the poor, to be leſs than they really are, and that a larger proportion of parochial expenſe has thereby been occaſioned than the fact will juſtify.

The

The report informs us, " that the money, ex-
" pended in ſetting the poor at work, amounts only
" to £15,892 : 8 : 10 per annum; and that the
" greateſt number of pariſhes made no entries of
" theſe expenſes." Hence have ariſen two deceptions; one with reſpect to the pariſhes which made entries of theſe expenſes, the other with regard to thoſe pariſhes which made no entries of them.

As to the former, the pariſhes which made entries, and whoſe expenſes in ſetting the poor at work are ſtated, as above, to have been £15,892 8*s.* 10*d.*; it has been thence concluded, that this was the ſum actually expended for the ſpecified purpoſe, and no more. This concluſion is utterly erroneous. However ſtrange it may appear, I venture to aſſert, becauſe I can prove it, that this account is ſo far from informing us what was the real and true expenditure under this head, that it gives no information at all; and it might have been, for any thing certain to the contrary, not only £15,892 8*s.* 10*d.* but more than £150,000. The true ſtate of the caſe was this: the overſeers of different pariſhes formed different ideas of the information required, and made their returns accordingly. This idea is not deduced from mere abſtract ſpeculation, but from innumerable facts ſtaring us in the face on the ſlighteſt inſpection. Two of theſe facts alone will

will afford ſatisfactory demonſtration of what I have aſſerted; and theſe two ſhall be taken from the pariſh of Dunmow and my native pariſh of Toppeſfield, theſe being moſt familiar to me. The pariſh of Dunmow, at the time the returns were made, contained about one thouſand ſix hundred inhabitants; the pariſh of Toppesfield, ſomething more than ſix hundred. They have each of them a workhouſe, and the treatment of the poor in both, in every reſpect, is as nearly the ſame as poſſible. The former containing about two two-thirds of inhabitants more than the latter, their returns of expenditure, for the end in queſtion, if made on the ſame principle, might be expected to have been nearly in the ſame proportion. But how was the fact? For Dunmow, £60; for Toppesfield, 1*s.* 10*d.* — Had the return for Toppesfield been made on the ſame principle as that for Dunmow, it would have been upwards of £22; had the return for Dunmow been made on the ſame principle as that for Toppesfield, it would have been only about 5*s.* What then is the concluſion? Is it that Dunmow was laudably attentive to the employment of its poor, and that Toppesfield was ſhamefully negligent? By no means. The only juſt concluſion is, that their joint information, for the purpoſe deſired, is good for nothing; and that what is thus certainly true, with regard to theſe two particular pariſhes, is applicable to the reſt of the kingdom, as far as

returns

returns under this article were made. I may, therefore, very ſafely repeat what I have above aſſerted, that the annual expenditure in ſetting the poor at work, inſtead of being only £15,892 : 8 : 10, might have been, for any thing apparent to the contrary, more than £150,000.

The cauſe of theſe two pariſhes making returns ſo ſtrangely different was what I juſt now intimated; they had formed different ideas of the information required. The return of 1*s.* 10*d.* for Toppesfield was the weekly ſum per head paid to the maſter or governor of the workhouſe for feeding the paupers in it; the £60 for Dunmow, as far as I have been able to learn or conjecture, was the eſtimated annual coſt of the raw materials for the employment of the workhouſe-poor.

With regard to the pariſhes which made no returns under this article, the deception has been nearly as great. The reaſon why theſe pariſhes made no returns of the expenſes incurred by ſetting the poor to work was, it has been thought, that they had no returns to make; having really expended nothing at all for this purpoſe. A ſtrange miſapprehenſion! The probable reaſon was, they were unable preciſely to aſcertain the expenſes. They were either ſo blended with other things as not eaſily to be ſeparated, or, having been once

diſtinctly

diſtinctly given in their monthly accounts, were afterwards transferred, together with other articles, in one groſs amount into the general book. The detailed ſtatements were thrown aſide, and no more to be found. That this was actually the caſe I am inclined to believe, from the inſtance of a pariſh in this neighbourhood; which, though diſtinguiſhed not only by its attention to the relief of its poor, but alſo for its care in finding them employment, and has alſo a workhouſe, made no returns of their expenſes for this purpoſe, when, notwithſtanding, for the reaſons now ſuggeſted, they muſt have been very conſiderable.

Upon the whole, the parochial returns to parliament of the expenſes incurred in ſetting the poor to work are utterly fallacious and deluſive. They give no juſt idea of the fact, and conſequently afford no ſolid ground, either to accuſe the overſeers of inattention and negligence, or the poor of indolence and lazineſs. At the ſame time it is readily acknowledged, that there is ſome foundation for both, and he who ſhall effectually remove it will deſerve highly of the public.

But, before we form any high expectation of the great reduction of expenſe hereby to be effected, we ſhould fairly conſider the *preſent actual* deficiency of the earnings of the agricultural labourers for their

their comfortable maintenance, even ſuppoſing them fully employed and duly induſtrious, as well as the *increaſe* of that deficiency in the courſe of the laſt forty or fifty years.

As to the preſent Deficiency of agricultural Wages.

Pretty ſatisfactory information reſpecting this may be collected from an excellent publication by the Rev. D. Davies, rector of Barkham, Berks, entitled, *The Caſe of Labourers in Huſbandry conſidered.* It is an incomparable work, and deſerves to be read much more than I fear it is. It there appears, from eſtimates made on the ſpot, in thirteen different counties, of the earnings and expenſes of a hundred and twenty-two induſtrious families, containing ſeven hundred and thirty perſons, that the latter, eſtimated ſo low as only about £4 : 10 per head per annum, exceeded the former more than £4 a family. Suppoſing there are a million of theſe families in the kingdom, which is not very wide of the fact, we have an annual deficiency of more than four millions ſterling, or almoſt double the actual amount of our rates. And it is to be remembered, that theſe conſiſt almoſt entirely of thoſe that are healthy and capable of labour. They include not the aged and infirm, the ſick and diſeaſed, with a numerous body of helpleſs orphans; all which together

ther can ſcarcely amount to leſs than a twentieth part of the number juſt ſtated; that is, two hundred and fifty thouſand individual perſons. Allow theſe to coſt £4: 10 annually per head, (little more than half what they are maintained for in our workhouſes and houſes of induſtry,) making a yearly ſum of more than a million; which, added to the four millions ſtated above, gives more than five millions deficiency for the annual expenſes of our labourers in huſbandry only, excluſive of a long and numerous liſt of poor manufacturers; generally ſuppoſed, though erroneouſly, to be much the moſt expenſive.

This, methinks, is tolerable evidence of the *preſent* deficiency of the wages in huſbandry, without conſidering the late and actual exorbitant price of wheat and other articles of proviſion. Of the *increaſing* deficiency during the laſt forty or fifty years, even prior to the year 1790, I have ſtill more certain and ſatisfactory proof.

In order to compare the earnings of labourers for different periods, we muſt conſider, not merely their nominal *daily wages*, but their earnings alſo by *piece-work*. This latter, fifty years ago, was very little in uſe; it is now, to the mutual benefit of maſter and workman, extremely common. That we may aſcertain preciſely the increaſe of earnings from

from this circumſtance, in addition to the actual advance of *daily wages*, we muſt not depend upon vague general information, but have recourſe to farmers' books regularly kept with correctneſs and accuracy. This is the mode I have adopted, in a great number and variety of inſtances, in this neighbourhood. By a farmer's books in my native pariſh, on an average of ten years, beginning with the year 1744, the annual earnings of three labourers, in the full vigour of life, and of unexceptionable induſtry, (for I remember them well,) were £15 : 12 : 7. The three families conſiſted of ſeventeen perſons, or nearly ſix to a family. Setting the earnings of the wife and children at £5, the total annual earnings of each family were £20 : 12 : 7. The neceſſaries furniſhed by the farmer, which were of every kind, excepting ſhoes, clothes, and ſhop-goods, amounted to £14 : 13 : 6; the remainder is eſtimated at £5 : 17 : 8; making the whole £20 : 11 : 2 for the medium annual expenſes; which, deducted from the earnings, leaves a balance of £0 : 1 : 5 in favour of the labourer.

How ſtands the matter for a ſimilar period, ending with 1787? The annual average-earnings of three labourers, of exactly the ſame deſcription as above, employed on the ſame farm, combined with the annual average-earnings of ſix labourers upon two other farms in the ſame pariſh, for the three

three years, 1787, 88, and 89, give a joint annual medium for each of £19:3:5; which, with the allowance of £5 for the earnings of the wife and children, (which is certainly high enough, as ſpinning was not ſo profitable as in the former period,) amounts to £24:3:5. Theſe nine families average as before between five and ſix perſons. Suppoſing them to uſe the ſame quantity of neceſſaries, and preciſely of the ſame quality as in the firſt period, and at the average-price they bore during the ten years, ending with 1787, and the total ſum is £31:3:7, leaving a deficiency of £7:0:2 to each family. The reader will ſee the whole at a glance in the following ſtatement for the two periods reſpectively.

	1ſt Period.					*2d Period.*		
	£.	*s.*	*d.*			£.	*s.*	*d.*
Annual expenſes,	20	11	2	. . . .		31	3	7
D° earnings,	20	12	7	. . . .		24	3	5
Exceſs of earnings,	0	1	5	Deficiency of earnings,		7	0	2

Of this deficiency the rates have ſupplied about forty ſhillings; the remaining £5 have ſunk the labourers into a ſtate of wretched and pitiable deſtitution. In the former period, the man, his wife, and

and children, were decently clothed and comfortably warmed and fed: now, on the contrary, the father and mother are covered with rags; their children are running about, like little ſavages, without ſhoes or ſtockings to their feet; and, by day and by night, they are forced to break down the hedges, lop the trees, and pilfer their fuel, or periſh with cold. For adequate relief, in this miſerable ſituation, they have little to hope *from the amendment of our poor-laws, — from the repeal or better regulation of the ſtatutes of ſettlement, — from benefit-clubs, — from the loan of ſmall capitals, — from the inſtitution of ſchools of induſtry.* — In my conception, theſe are all *trifles light as air*, nor will their joint operation on the kingdom at large ever reduce the collective national rates one penny in the pound.

Nothing will reſtore comfort to our peaſantry but the reſtoration of the balance between the produce of their labour and the price of proviſions. Then, as heretofore, the beſt ſchool of early induſtry will be the peaſant's cot, and no other will be wanting. Whether this balance be effected by judicious legal regulation,* or the natural courſe of events, the be-

 nefit

* No diſadvantage whatever would hence reſult to inferior labourers, to perſons weak in body, or of minds fooliſh and half-witted. Their comparative condition would be preciſely the

nefit to the labourer and the benefit to the public will be perfectly the ſame. Legal regulation, ſo as on the one hand to allow a proper maintenance for the peaſant, and, on the other, leave full encouragement to the exertions of agriculture, is, it is acknowledged, a very nice and difficult matter; and ſhould never, according to my preſent conceptions, be left to the unaſſiſted judgement of the magiſtrates; I mean the juſtices, either in their petty or quarter ſeſſions; it ſhould be the reſult of the cleareſt, the fulleſt, and moſt accurate, information; and at length be judiciouſly adapted to each county, hundred, or diſtrict, reſpectively, in every quarter of the kingdom. And I have ſome faint glimpſe of hope, that this, in a great meaſure, may be accompliſhed by what appears to me the only excellent part of Mr. Pitt's plan, *the appointment of proper perſons to report the ſtate of each pariſh.* Theſe reports may poſſibly ſuggeſt ideas to parliament that may lead, either to the beſt mode of fixing the rate of wages, if that finally ſhould be found expedient, or elſe ſo to influence the courſe of events, as gradually to produce the much-talked-of level between wants and wages without legiſlative interference. This latter would certainly be the moſt deſirable as

the ſame, whether their wages were fixed by law or were the reſult of eventual cuſtom. Voluntary contract would, in both caſes, be equally in the power of maſter and workman.

being

being the moſt likely to be pleaſing and ſatisfactory to all parties. And who knows but the propoſed *enclоſure of our waſte-lands*, under the direction of our board of agriculture, may be highly conducive to this purpoſe, as it will probably afford the faireſt and beſt opportunity of ſupplying the ſcarcity of hands in one quarter by their ſuperabundance in another.

Whatever reception theſe papers may meet with in other reſpects, I am ſure to eſcape the imputation of having written them to pleaſe a party. Upon a ſlight review of them, I find there are ſome things advanced, which, if they attract any notice or attention at all, may poſſibly be offenſive to perſons of every party and of every deſcription. Should this happen to be the caſe, it will give me real concern. I meant to offend no one; and I ſhould be aſhamed to affect a ſtoical inſenſibility to the eſtimation of the public. But, whether it approve or diſapprove, is with me an object of inferior conſideration. My principal aim always has been, and always ſhall be, as far as my ſlender abilities admit, to diſcover and eſtabliſh important truths; hoping, at the ſame time, I ſhall ever be diſpoſed to change my ſentiments, and to acknowledge and retract

retract any errors, on the appearance of adequate evidence. As a preſumptive proof that this is not mere affectation, but the genuine feelings of my heart, I cannot help adding, before I ſend my laſt paragraph to the preſs, that I have this moment read, with inexpreſſible ſatisfaction, what Mr. Pitt is reported to have ſaid in the Houſe on the 1ſt of this month, relative to the better improvement of the exiſting laws *for the relief and employment of the poor*; and that I am induced to conclude I muſt have been ſomewhat miſled in my conceptions as to what he had before advanced on the *general ſyſtem and ſpirit of our poor-laws.* Nor can I withhold my admiration of that fair, that wiſe, and judicious, mode propoſed to be adopted, in order to render the future regulations on the ſubject as perfect as poſſible.

THE END.

BRITISH MUSEUM